



Held Safe

Hold Space

It is never too late for any of us to look at our minds. We can always sit down and allow the space for anything to arise. Sometimes we have a shocking experience of ourselves. Sometimes we try to hide. Sometimes we have a surprising experience of ourselves. Often we get carried away. Without judging, without buying into likes and dislikes, we can always encourage ourselves to just be here again and again and again.

— Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*

[I]f we're able to leave room for the encounters that will change us in ways we can't see, we can also acknowledge that we are each a confluence of forces that exceed our own understanding. This explains why, when I hear a song I unexpectedly like, I sometimes feel like something I don't know is talking to something else I don't know, through me. For a person invested in a stable and bounded ego, this kind of acknowledgment would be a death wish. But personally, having given up on the idea of an atomic self, I find it to be the surest indicator that I'm alive.

— Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing*



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v4.0

This is a guide for people who want to have safe, spiritually fulfilling psychedelic experiences. We define this as when a person takes a substance, voyages into themselves, perceives the world differently for a few hours, and slowly comes back to reality, changed by the experience.

Assuming *you're* a good fit for an experience, it could potentially be the most important thing you ever do. And it's important to be careful with something so powerful. Experiences should happen in the right environment, with the right substances, with the right people, and for the right reasons.

We come into the world with a certain set of cognitive tools. We can go through life just fine with these tools. Billions of people have. But the ritual of a psychedelic experience – and the rituals *around* having one, like intention-setting and integration – is the equivalent of being sent on a shopping spree at the psychic hardware store. We get new *and better* tools, helping us work on ourselves in ways we may have not previously thought possible.

Experiences shake the snow globe of our minds. We get more in touch with our feelings. We figure out what really matters to us. We understand new ways of being conscious, alive people. In a spiritual, aesthetic, and emotional sense, our experiences never fully leave us.

Having therapeutic experiences

Experiences can be either *recreational* or *therapeutic*:

- **Recreational** is the most common sort of experience, which usually involves taking a substance for fun, not for insight. Usually a sober sitter

isn't present for recreational experiences, and the setting can be pretty much anywhere.

- **Therapeutic** experiences involving taking substances in a safe environment, with the explicit goal of working on aspects of yourself. You approach the experience like it has something to tell you, and you listen to what it says. This is the sort of experience that we discuss having in this guide.

For us, each experience can and should be treated as an opportunity for deep insight. And we believe there should be a gentler and more inclusive approach to psychedelic experiences than what most literature currently provides, unencumbered by the mistakes of the past and looking towards personal improvement on each individual's own terms.

We've written this guide with these beliefs in mind, and we hope it's helpful for you. We've collectively had many experiences ourselves, sat for many others, and have read dozens of books on the subject.

In this guide, we'll talk about why you might want to have an experience, how to have one with maximal consideration for your safety, what to expect during your experience, and how to incorporate an experience into your daily life.

Hold Space, the second half of this book, is for those who wish to help others have similar experiences.

Deciding to have an experience

Because of psychedelics' complicated history and misrepresentation by governments and pop culture, there remains a strong social stigma about them. As a result, if you share that you've had an experience, people might be confused, upset, or even frightened.

Most people don't spend much time talking about psychedelic experiences with their friends, either – and when they do, it rapidly becomes quite personal, since experiences can be so transformational and personally rooted. As a result, it may be difficult to even broach that you're interested in having an experience. Same with asking whether others have had an experience, whether they have access to any substances, or whether they'd sit for you.

With the power and the stigma associated with psychedelic experiences, it can be tough to decide or discuss whether one is right for you, or right for you *right now*. These steps can help.

Exploring the possibility

It's natural to still be unsure of whether you should have an experience – especially if it's your first time. If you're unsure, talk to others whom you know have had experiences. Ask:

- Under what circumstances did they have their experiences?
- Why did they decide to have an experience?
- What did their experiences do for them?
- How did they feel before and after their experiences?
- Are they still processing what they saw?

- Was there anything in their daily life that helped them understand more about their psychedelic experience?
- What do they wish they had done differently?
- Are there any lessons that you could take to heart?

You should also do what you can to read more about an experience. Ours is only one perspective, and it helps to understand exactly what you're getting yourself into.¹

All of this should serve to guide your own reasons for having an experience. The more you know about what it could involve, the more you'll understand about your own motivations and intentions.

In short, if you're on the fence, try to learn more about having an experience. Read more about it. Trust your friends. Examine your reasons. And take your time.

Talking around it

It's important to have others to talk to about psychedelic experiences. Processing can't happen alone: it requires the understanding and care of others. And others can also be helpful for guiding your intentions and leading you to come to an experience for the right reasons.



¹ As of this writing, most psychedelic literature is unfocused on the reader's needs – which is why we've written this guide. That said, you may wish to read *How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan, which is the best summary we've seen of why one would want to have an experience. The first & sixth chapters provide an abridged summary. You can read more at <https://michaelpollan.com/books/how-to-change-your-mind/>.

Next, let's talk about how to discuss psychedelics with maximal care and consideration for friends and loved ones – while also allowing yourself to get what *you* need.²

Having the conversation

Psychedelic conversations should be broached with maximal care, since you're discussing a deeply private matter:

- First, talk *one-on-one*, in a quiet, un-crowded place, so you can focus entirely on one person – and eliminate the likelihood of others judging you.
- Acknowledge that you're making an unusual request. Psychedelics rarely come up in conversation. Set the listener up to hear you out first.
- Finally, be specific in what you need and why. Are you exploring whether to have an experience, and want to ask about theirs? Are you asking them to sit for you? Did you have an experience recently, and need someone to listen?

It is always a relief to find that someone understands and respects your psychedelic life. But you'll want to find many people to talk to. Other perspectives are useful, especially on a topic this important.

² There's no psychedelic etiquette book (yet!), but the Emily Post Institute wrote a book on cannabis called *Higher Etiquette* that discusses social stigmas in depth around the topic of substance use, and we strongly recommend it. You can read more at <https://emilypost.com/book/higher-etiquette/>.

Health considerations

Most well-known health risks of psychedelics are actually disinformation spread by the government during a period when it feared psychedelic substances' sociological impact.³

In reality, pure versions of a substance are of minimal harm.⁴ What matters, then, is ensuring purity and consistency in your dose. You don't want to take anything that you're unsure about.

You're doing something that has huge psychological impact, so it's important to proceed with caution. Most of a successful experience is a matter of **harm reduction** – which we define as a set of common-sense strategies to ensure maximal safety.⁵ To have a safe experience:



- **Start small.** First-timers are advised to take no more than 100µg of LSD or 3g of mushrooms for their first experience. Tabs can vary in their dose size, so if you don't know, take a half-hit to be sure. It's far better to be mildly disappointed and try again later than to have an intense experience that you didn't expect.

³ The third chapter of Michael Pollan's *How to Change Your Mind* goes into an impartial historical summary of when and why psychedelic substances were banned by the American government in particular.

⁴ LSD in particular was synthesized by a pharmaceutical company, and it underwent thousands of successful clinical trials before it was banned.

⁵ The term "harm reduction" has specific connotations in public health. We are applying the term in a narrower way for the purpose of this guide.

- **Test your substances** before you take them – especially with LSD and MDMA, as impurities can result in extremely dangerous situations.
- First-timers should only have an experience in a **private home**, surrounded by others who have already had experiences, with no other visitors coming by for the entire duration. This ensures maximal safety, and the fewest variables when having a therapeutic experience.

And there are a few circumstances under which you shouldn't have an experience:

- You shouldn't have an experience if you're grieving, dealing with major life trauma, or contending with **major issues in your job or personal life**. Your experience is a reflection of where your head is at, and having experiences when dealing with major issues increase the likelihood of difficult moments.
- You should not have an experience if you are taking any SSRIs, SNRIs, MAOIs, nootropics, St. John's Wort, or **any other medication** that could affect your brain chemistry or serotonin levels. At best, you won't have a full-strength experience; at worst, you may have a significant reaction. You should trip only after you have fully tapered off any prescription medication. Taper only under the care of a qualified medical practitioner.
- If you have any **heart issues**, or a family history of **seizures**, **schizophrenia**, or any significant mental health issues, you might want to proceed with caution, taking a small dose if at all.

- Human brains take around 25 years to fully develop,⁶ by many doctors' estimations,⁷ and the long-term impacts of an experience on young people are understudied. As a result, we recommend not having an experience until you're **at least 25**. If you get access to substances at a younger age, we recommend storing them somewhere safe until you're ready.⁸
- Don't have an experience **if you're sick**.

While it's important to proceed with caution, *there is no one perfect time to have an experience*. If you've exercised enough caution, followed these steps, and proceeded when you're confident enough, you'll probably do fine. Be careful, but don't overthink it.

⁶ See "Brain Maturity Extends Well Beyond Teen Years", Tell Me More, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=141164708> for more information.

⁷ See "Human Brain Development Timeline" on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_brain_development_timeline.

⁸ For long-term storage, LSD needs to be kept in a light-tight, airtight container in your freezer. Mushrooms should be kept in an airtight container, with desiccant packets, in a cool, dark place.

Preparation

With a little preparation, anyone can have a safe experience. Here's what we advise to prepare for yours.

What goes into a successful experience

- Your **mindset** (or **set** for short) is how you feel going into the experience. Having a positive outlook can help you have a positive experience – and a negative outlook might harm your ability to get real insight.
- The **setting** is where you've chosen to have your experience. First-timers are advised to have their experience in a private home.
- Your **dose** is how much you plan on taking. An average hit of LSD is 100µg, and an average dose of dried mushrooms is 3g, but these can vary significantly in potency, so it helps to find vetted sources first. Effects vary from person to person, so you may want to start small if you consider yourself a lightweight.
- A **sitter** is anyone you've trusted to be in the room with you during your experience.⁹ Sitters guide you, tend to your personal needs, and help you make sense of your experience in the days and weeks afterward.

Find experienced sitters

Having others sit for you is essential. Sitters stay sober, hold space, keep you safe, and attend to your needs. You might be significantly incapacitated dur-

⁹ Note that a sitter is not the same thing as a religious *shaman*, who guides people to spiritual insight. Shamans are specific to certain indigenous cultures, and are part of private sacred practices. They are not for uninitiated outsiders.

For more on the practice of psychedelic guidance in this space, as well as a wealth of additional insight into the practices and traditions of numerous native cultures, read *Consciousness Medicine* by Françoise Bourzat.

ing an experience, so sitters are there to stay on the ground, connect you to reality, and look out for your own safety. They are not optional for any therapeutic experience.

Sitting is a sacred trust. It takes a significant amount of work for a sitter to prepare for any experience, including yours. The sitter's job is to get out of your way, so you can have an experience that fits your stated intentions.¹⁰ That sounds easy on the face of things, but it takes work, practice, and patience.¹¹

One sitter is better than none, but ideally, you should have two. With two sitters, one of them (the primary) should be talking to you, guiding you if needed; and the other (the secondary) can fetch things, clean up the house, take over for the primary when needed, and generally attend to your needs.

Confirm a date

Once you have sitters lined up, you'll need to schedule a date with them. You should spend one day preparing and resting, one day having the experience, and one day for recuperation and processing.¹²

LSD takes about 12-16 hours to run its course; mushrooms take about 4-6 hours. LSD is a stimulant, so it's usually good to start as early in the day as

¹⁰ For more about setting good intentions, see page 18.

¹¹ *Hold Space* provides comprehensive instructions for sitters. We also recommend *The Secret Chief Revealed* by Leo Zeff & Myron J. Stolaroff for a therapeutic perspective, downloadable at <https://maps.org/images/pdf/books/scr/scr.pdf>. We also recommend "Ground Control: A Sitter's Primer" for a practical summary, which is available at https://erowid.org/psychoactives/guides/guides_article2.shtml.

¹² You might also want to take the following day off, if you can, so you can rest fully before going back to work.

you can. Mushrooms are a little more flexible; you can start later in the day, ideally mid-afternoon.

Sitters should be around for the whole day, including after your come-down has finished.

Initial preparation

If you have any medication that you're taking, or you've taken any substances that might affect your serotonin levels, you need to taper fully for at least 30 days before your experience, so that you have an experience without any potential health issues.

You shouldn't be going through any major stresses for a couple of weeks beforehand, since that might increase the likelihood of difficult moments happening during your experience. If you get laid off, or find yourself suddenly grieving or in crisis, don't be afraid to reschedule.

Setting intentions

In the weeks before your experience, you'll want to establish a clear intention for what you hope to get out of it. Having intentions will bring focus and clarity to your experience, while also providing a framework for processing the insights you get from it.

Intentions could be *social*: how you relate to others, and how you relate to them. They could be *spiritual*: how you relate to your life, higher powers, etc. They could be *natural*: how you relate to nature and the universe. They could be *personal*: how you treat yourself, what routines you have, how you decide, how you love. Or they could involve any combination of these categories.

Write your intentions down, and mull them over a few times before your experience.

Day-before preparation

If you can take the day before off from work or other responsibilities, before, do it. It's enormously valuable to take a day for rest, reflection, and self-care, because doing so allows you to be in the right headspace on the day of your experience – and it allows you to focus and clarify your intentions.

Here's what you can do on the day before your experience:

- **Journal about your intentions.** It's completely fine if your intentions shift: simply notice the change, reflect on it, and embrace your new feelings.
- **Eat as healthy as possible.** The day before an experience is not the time for you to have a deep-fried steak. You want your mind sharp, and you want to get to maximize the impact of your experience. Think grain bowls and vegetables. Think simplicity and balance. Eat as little meat as possible.
- **Appreciate nature.** Head to the forest or a park. Bring a notebook, or just sit and stare with no plan at all.
- **Meditate.** If meditation is your thing, this can be a good option to clear your mind.¹³

¹³ If meditation is not your thing, but you've always wanted to get started, now is a good time. Download an app and start using it daily.

- **Practice yoga.**¹⁴ The day before an experience can be great for practicing, helping to return you to your body and clear your mind.
- **Don't drink or use cannabis.** The more clouded your head is, the harder it will be for you to fully grasp what's happening in your experience.
- **Get at least 8 hours of sleep.** The more rested you are before an experience, the better.



¹⁴ Yoga practitioners get deep insight out of psychedelic experiences, with many people saying that yoga makes considerably more sense after their first experience. See Amanda Tust, “Would You Consider Trying Psychedelics to Take Your Practice to Another Level?”, Yoga Journal, <https://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/yoga-meditation-and-psychedelics> for more.

The experience itself

On the day of your experience, what should you do and expect?

- **Eat as light as possible.** Think fruit, nuts, simple grains. Your experience will be significantly diminished if you eat a heavy meal beforehand, because the substance won't be able to take effect as quickly. You will not feel hungry during your experience, and your sitters can provide you with a meal as you come down.
- **Take your time.** If you're commuting, give yourself plenty of time to arrive, so you don't feel too stressed by transit.
- **Trust your gut.** If you have any last-minute butterflies, don't hesitate to reschedule. Your own safety and comfort come first.

Starting

Before starting, express your intentions to your sitter. This allows you and your sitters to remain conscious of your intentions as you go through your experience.

Work with your sitters to create a safe and comfortable setting for yourself. Smoke cleanse the space if that's your thing. Say a prayer if you feel moved to. Put on music that you enjoy if you'd like.

Once you've taken your dose, find a soft, comfortable place – a bed, couch, or outdoor recliner – and get ready to come up.¹⁵

¹⁵ **Come-up** and **comedown** are the periods before and after one's peak.

Come-up

Your come-up will take about an hour and a half for LSD, or a half-hour for mushrooms. During your come-up, you may feel some light nausea (especially if you're taking mushrooms), light-headedness, and your surroundings may appear to shimmer a little bit. Music may sound clearer; your visual acuity may get sharper.

The best thing you can do during your come-up is to *let go and surrender to the experience*. The more comfortable and relaxed you feel, the more likely you'll have a positive experience. Pay attention to your breath, listen to the music that your sitters are playing, and let go of your concerns.

Letting go is natural during this period. Let it happen. Don't fight it.

Peak

Your peak¹⁶ will last about 2 to 3 hours, under most circumstances, if you have controlled your dose. You should stick to a comfortable place during your peak, and let your sitter guide you gently if needed.

You may also want to keep an eyeshade on hand, in case you want to focus on yourself during your peak. Nature is amazing during an experience, but so is understanding your own internal world. Your intentions will give you a sense of which to focus on.

Your peak is also the time when you can potentially have a breakthrough experience. Breakthrough experiences are more typical with higher doses.

¹⁶ One's **peak** is the period of maximal effect. This tends to happen near the middle of one's mushroom experience, and in the first third of one's experience with LSD.

Come-down

Once you start to come off your peak, you may regain some sense of reality and start coming back into your body. Visuals are usually prominent around this time.

In the middle of your come-down, your sitters should offer you a light meal. LSD is a stimulant and an appetite suppressant, so it's usually the first time you'll feel hungry all day.

Common phenomena

An experience can have any of these qualities to it:

- **Entheogenic.** This is type of experience that results in some sort of major spiritual insight, including contact with a spirit or entity, meeting a god or God, belief that *you're* god, or the witnessing of a major stage of life, such as your birth or death.
- **Breakthrough.** A breakthrough, also called a *transformational experience*, is one that permanently changes your view of yourself and the world. You'll know it if you accomplish it.
- **Difficult moments.** There is no such thing as a "bad trip". Instead, there can be *difficult moments* within one's experience, where they may reckon with personal issues or darker forces. Difficult moments are always possible, even writ small: one could have an amazing 12-hour experience with 5 minutes of difficulty. But with appropriate preparation, it's also easy to minimize the likelihood of difficult moments happening.¹⁷

¹⁷ We'll talk more about how to do this in a little bit.

Difficult moments can always happen during an experience – but they are not *bad*. Difficult moments can teach us important things about ourselves. A difficult moment's insights can be viewed as opportunities for growth.

Both you and your sitters will probably know a difficult moment when it happens, even though they are different for everyone in practice. When difficult moments happen, your sitters will help you get through, focus your attention away from what you're experiencing, and hold the space. They might also hold your hand (if you consent, of course), since human contact can be especially helpful.

- **Trails & fractals** are common forms of **visuals** that one might see during an experience.
- Not all psychedelic experiences result in visual hallucinations, but **open-eye visuals** (OEV for short) & **closed-eye visuals** (CEV for short) are used when discussing the things that people see with their eyes open or closed. Closed-eye visuals tend to be felt more on inwardly focused experiences, and open-eye visuals tend to be felt more on experiences that connect you to nature or others.
- Most psychedelic experiences involve a loss of ego to some degree, which mediates your relationship to reality. When you completely lose control of yourself and your reality, you experience what's frequently called **ego death**.
- Especially on LSD, one might see a **white light** during some portion of their peak.

- Time has a habit of appearing to slow down during one's experience, to the point where you might perceive what seems like a compressed eternity. This is often called **time dilation**.



After your experience

When all is said and done, it's vitally important to honor the truth of what you experienced. Everything you experienced really happened, is a reflection of your true self, and should be treated with the utmost respect.

Insights balance on a knife's edge in the days after your experience. It's all too easy to dismiss one's experience as the ravings of a distressed mind. Taking insights seriously is *always* a conscious choice.

You should try to figure out what your experience meant, how to integrate it into your life, and what to do next. The more effort you put into processing an experience, the more likely it will enrich you.

Psychedelic insights

Many people find *spiritual* insight in their experiences. They relive major episodes of their lives, achieve a feeling of "oneness" with the world, connect deeply with the natural world, encounter spirits or "entities," or come to conclusions about their creator or the afterlife.

Many people find *personal* insight as well: that parts of their life now shine through with new clarity, that their relationships with others come into new relief, or that they should make changes in their life.

You're probably going to come out of your experience realizing something. Insights work best as guideposts, helping to ground us and shape our actions for the rest of our lives.

The process of incorporating insights into your life is called **integration**. Be mindful of what insights you've received from your experience, and make sure that any changes last.

The day after

It helps to keep the day after your experience fully clear for rest, reflection, and meditation. Finding clarity and peace is vitally important in the hours and days following your experience, as your mind may still be overwhelmed.

Stay around your home, order delivery if you need, maybe invite close friends over to talk about what you experienced, meet with your primary sitter if you want, or go be in nature.

Journaling

It helps to write as much as you possibly can about your experience the day after. Your experience will never be fresher in your mind. Write down *everything*. No detail is too small or absurd.

The more you write, the more you'll remember – and the more you'll recall whenever you go back and revisit what you've written. That matters for figuring out what you saw, why you saw it, and what that means for you.

If writing isn't your thing, try to find some other way of expressing your experience. Record your own voice, draw, sketch, etc. Express whatever fits for you.

How frequently?

In our experience, it takes at least six months to process your experience, and another six months to prepare your intentions for the next one. Because of this, we recommend waiting at least a year between experiences if you haven't had a breakthrough, and at least a year and a half if you have.

We believe infrequent experiences are a harm reduction measure. Our real lives should be foregrounded to our psychedelic experiences. Psychedelic

substances are non-addictive, but if you have experiences any more frequently, lasting insight may be harder to find.

Think of your psychedelic insights like a psychic workload. After you have an experience, it takes time to get through that workload, so that you can find a way to really make use of it. It becomes far harder to incorporate your first batch of insights when another batch hits your proverbial desk. You forget what the first experience taught you, and your judgment gets clouded by what the next experience is trying to teach you.

Take the time to incorporate what each experience teaches you, on your own time. You don't need to be in any hurry.

Take care

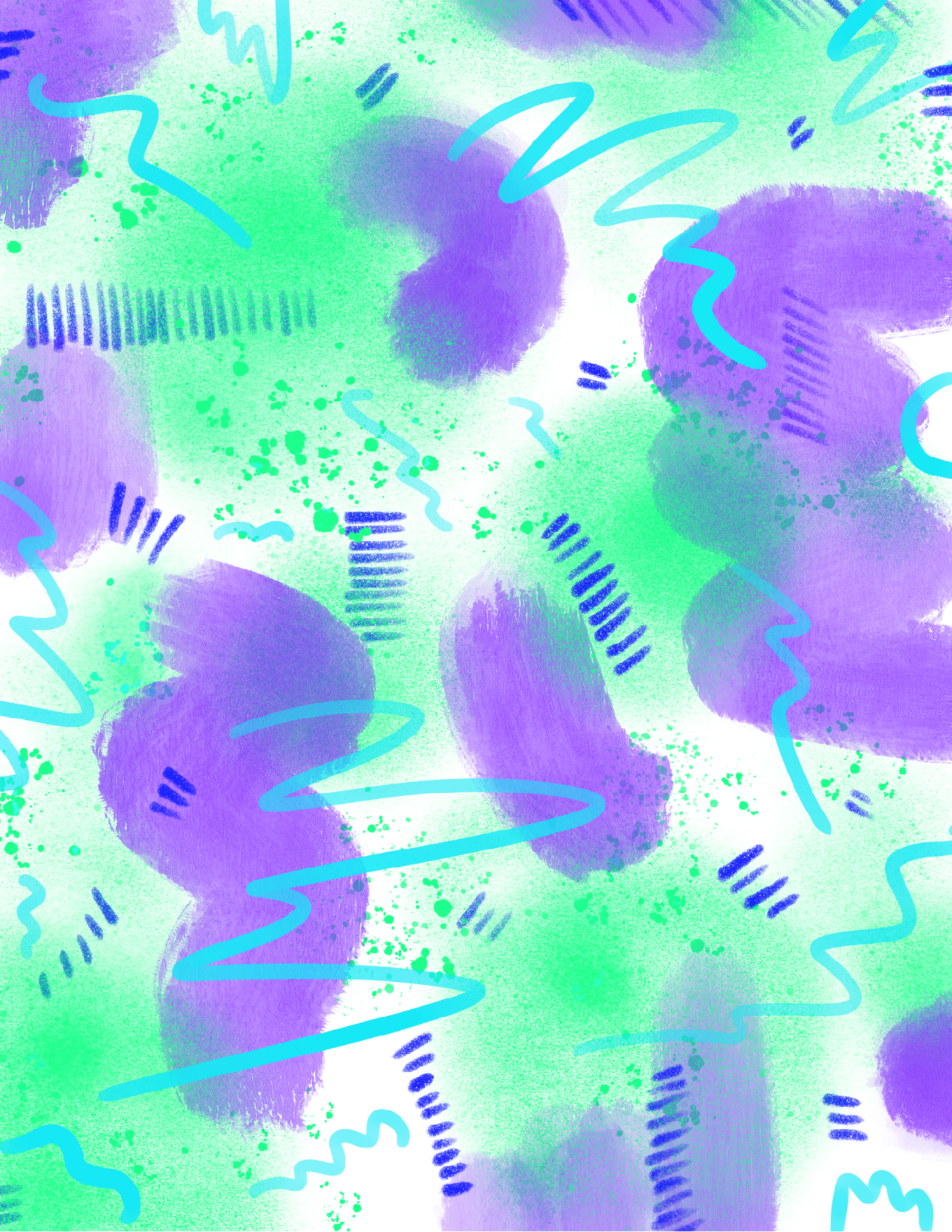
Whether you choose to do this is entirely up to you. The door is open. It's up to you to walk through it.

We hope that you approach your own experience with eyes open, with consideration of your safety and care. Practice common sense, find your community, don't be afraid, remember what your experience told you, and pay it forward.

Your experience is yours alone. It's going to be nothing like anyone else's. And it will really happen. Believe in it. Have faith. Nobody can *ever* take that from you.

Good luck, and be safe.





Hold Space

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When embarking on any psychedelic experience,¹⁸ we think it's vitally important to have at least one sober, knowledgeable sitter on hand.¹⁹ And nobody knows how to be a good sitter out of the gate, regardless of the depth of their own personal experience.²⁰ That's where this guide comes in.

Sitting is an avocation that pays forward the love and care that others might have put into *your* experience – or, perhaps, a way of reflecting the desires and goals that one would have wanted for their own experiences. In this guide, we'll help you provide fulfilling and enriching experiences for anyone: setting expectations, creating a safe environment, attending to their needs, and helping them integrate their experience into their daily life.

This guide is written in conjunction with *Held Safe*, which describes how to have safe, fulfilling psychedelic experiences yourself.

¹⁸ We focus exclusively on therapeutic experiences in this guide, not recreational experiences. This is not meant to be an authoritative resource. We suggest consulting a few other perspectives as well.

In particular, we recommend *The Secret Chief Revealed* by Leo Zeff & Myron J. Stolaroff for a therapeutic perspective, downloadable at <https://maps.org/images/pdf/books/scr/scr.pdf>. We also recommend “Ground Control: A Sitter’s Primer” for a practical summary, which is available at https://erowid.org/psychoactives/guides/guides_article2.shtml.

¹⁹ The term “sitter” is commonly interpreted as a shortening of *babysitter*, which we think is condescending. Instead, we prefer a literal interpretation: the sitter *literally* sits and pays attention as somebody goes through their experience.

²⁰ Prior psychedelic experience is essential for any sitter. Before sitting for anyone, you must have previously had an experience of your own. Having an experience makes you accustomed to what is happening to the guest – and it means you're considerably more likely to respond with compassion and understanding.

Who to sit for

First and foremost, you must determine whether to sit for someone in the first place. You should spend some time figuring out why you want to sit in general, and why you would want to sit for anyone in specific, since that may guide you to a clearer decision.

Not everyone should have an experience, and not every time is appropriate. Above all else, you must ensure that the guest is a good fit for you – and you’re a good fit for the guest.²¹

When deciding, it helps to understand why the guest wants to have an experience in the first place. Some of the following questions are good to ask:

- Why do you want to have an experience?
- What do you hope to get out of your experience?
- Why right now?
- Have you talked to others about wanting to have an experience?
- Why do you want me to sit for you? Who else might you reach out to?
- How are you feeling with your life overall?
- Who might support you after you have your experience?

If the guest has any intentions that don’t fit the sort of spiritual and personal care that you want to provide as a sitter, you shouldn’t sit for them – because it might result in a negative outcome for you, the guest, or both.

²¹ We use the term “guest” throughout as a neutral way of expressing who you’re sitting for. The term also implies service, which is important to do as you sit for anyone.

If the guest wants an experience simply because they found out that you have access to a substance, you should explore their intentions further, since they might not fully understand the significance of what they're getting themselves into.

If the guest has a heart condition or a risk of seizures, taking high doses of a substance could result in major issues, and you might not want to sit for them.

If the guest is taking any medication that could affect their serotonin levels (SSRIs, SNRIs, MAOIs, St. John's Wort, nootropics, most other brain meds), you could end up with a significant health issue on your hands,²² and you shouldn't sit for them while they are using these medications. Guests interested in tapering off medication should do so only under the guidance of a clinical professional.²³

Your instincts are worth listening to. If you have a bad gut feeling about sitting for a guest, up to and including the day of their experience, it's always better to say no than to deal with a potential crisis.

Always proceed with caution, and only move forward when the answer is a firm, unqualified yes from all parties. Enthusiastic consent is important for both you and the guest.

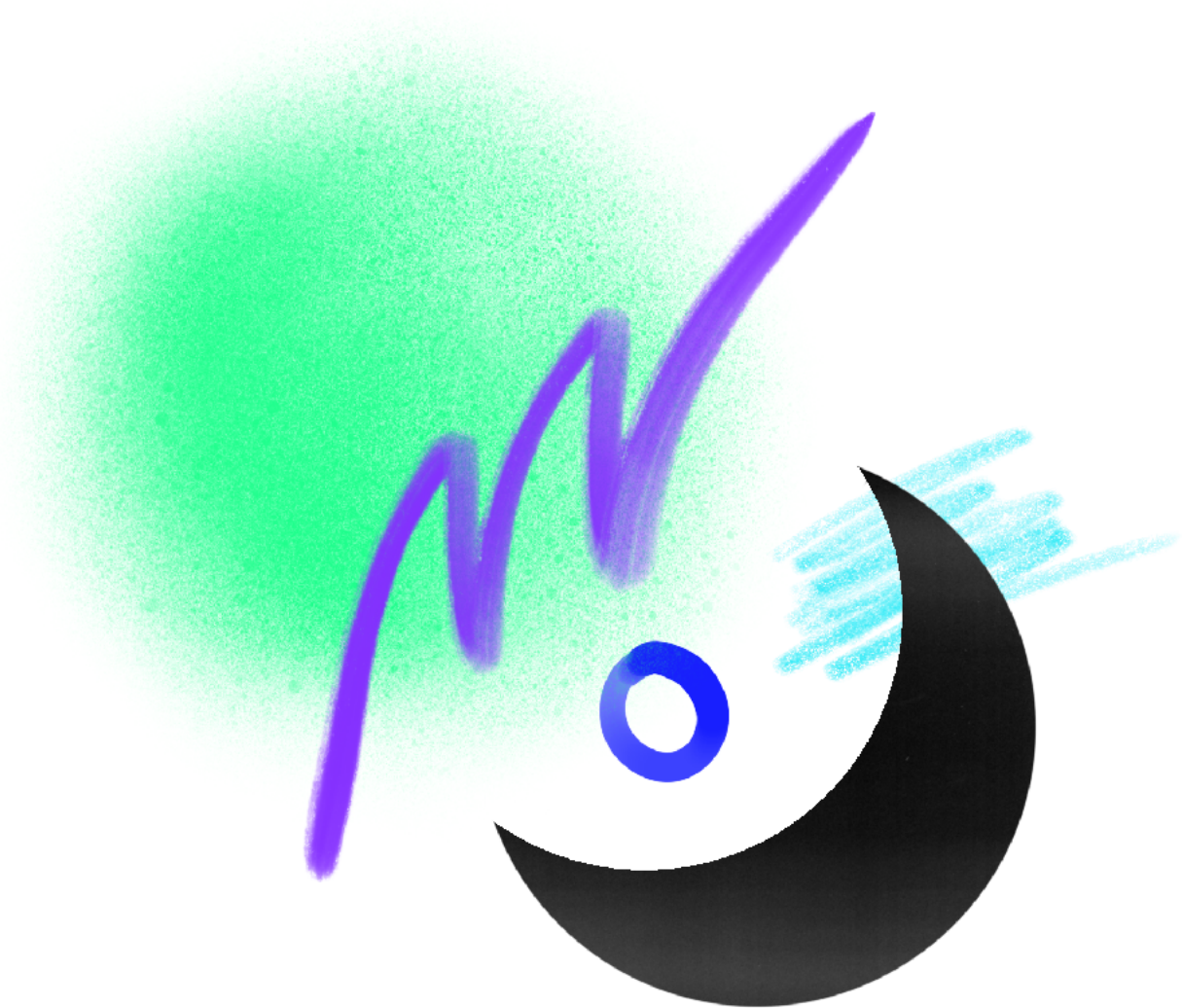
People often sit for friends or lovers. In these cases, and *especially* with a lover, it's important to separate your duties as a sitter from your relationship

²² There are not enough clinical trials to confirm the precise effects of psychedelic substances with all other drugs. For an overall summary, however, see Erowid at <https://erowid.org>.

²³ We're not doctors. If you're on the fence or still have questions, it's best to research further or consult a medical professional.

to them. You'll want to be clear when you're responding as the guest's sitter, versus when you're responding as their friend or lover.

Finally, we don't advocate taking money in compensation for your service, since this could influence everyone's intentions. Instead, we recommend working selflessly, in service to the guest, with no expectation of favors or compensation in the future.



Beforehand

Before your guest's experience, you'll spend some time preparing them for what to expect, especially if this is their first time. Do as much as you possibly can to set expectations. Guests should know as much about what they're getting themselves into as you can provide for them.

That said, explaining what *could* happen in an experience might color the guest's experience itself. Let expectation-setting be a dialogue. Answer their questions. And make sure you've covered your bases on important issues like the guest's health needs, their intentions, the setting, and logistics.

Ideally, you'll meet with the guest at least a few times to discuss where they're at in their lives, why they want to partake in an experience, why now is the right time, and what they know about having experiences in the first place.

Provide any resources that you think might be appropriate,²⁴ and offer yourself as an ongoing resource to answer any questions.²⁵

²⁴ Books, articles, experience reports, people who have had their own experiences, etc., for example.

²⁵ We don't recommend SMS or social media for communicating with guests. Instead, we recommend Signal, which is a private, encrypted messaging service that allows messages to disappear over a predetermined period. You can download Signal for your platform of choice at <https://signal.org>.

Note that this recommendation is only current as of press time, and you may wish to investigate other encrypted messaging services before suggesting one to your guest.

Planning an experience

As you learn more about the guest, sketch out what their experience might look like. What do you need to know when it comes to caring for their needs?

What to ask

When planning someone's experience, you should figure out:

- Where to go
- What to bring
- How the guest wants to be guided (assuming they know)
- What food to provide (ask about dietary restrictions)
- Whether the guest has any specific music requests

The most important thing you can do as a sitter is to focus on the guest and their needs. If you've ever been to a *really* fancy meal, you know that good service is a matter of attending to the diner's needs without getting in the way. Sitters convey a similarly relaxed, friendly manner, giving off chill vibes on an exciting and celebratory day.

Intentions

Before the guest's experience, ask them to establish clear intentions for what they want to get out of it. This helps them pursue what they want in their experience – and it also helps you know how, and whether, to sit for them.

Expectations are different from *intentions*. Expectations are what someone should likely get out of their experience in a broad sense: how long they'll be on peak, or when they'll get hungry, for example. Intentions are what the

guest consciously hopes to get out of their experience in terms of psychedelic insight.

Setting

If the guest has no prior experience, they should first have their experience in the safety of someone's home. Outdoor trips are amazing, but we think they're best for those who have already had an experience.

Homes are private by definition. They also have a clear delineation between public and private. This allows you to set clear boundaries for the guest, it allows you to control who has access to the guest during their experience, and it allows the guest to feel comfortable with their environment.

Two sitters

One sitter is better than none, but having two sitters is ideal. Guests are *extremely* suggestible in the middle of an experience, and having two sitters keeps each sitter accountable to one another and to the guest.

One sitter (called the *primary*) should be talking to the guest; and the other (the *secondary*) should fetch things, take notes, clean up the space, and take over as primary when needed.

Guests are acutely sensitive to their surroundings during an experience, but sitters still need to talk to each other. Both sitters can communicate over text messaging in order not to disturb the guest, especially at their peak. Typing on a phone tends to disturb the guest less than talking out loud.

A guest may prefer sitters of specific genders, backgrounds, or orientations. They may also prefer not to be sat for by a romantic partner. The

guest's preferences are a matter of their own comfort and safety, and they must be honored.

Devices

Guests should not have any devices, including smartwatches or fitness trackers, on them during their experience. Their devices should be turned on airplane mode and left elsewhere in the space. Texting while in the middle of an experience frequently results in regrettable social situations, and screens often look weird or gross, too. You want to stay in the natural world, be present with your surroundings, and let the internet go for a day.

Sitters should have their phones turned on silent or vibrate. Nothing messes with a guest's vibe quite like a phone ringing.

Always be careful about dose

Of course, dose is a major influencer on the kind of experience that someone will have, and you should always honor the guest's intentions. If a guest wants a gentler experience, they should do a half dose.²⁶ If they want something that might yield bigger insights, they should do a full dose.²⁷ If they want a more entheogenic or therapeutic experience, they should do a 1.5-size dose or a double dose.

Because it's unclear how people will respond their first time, newcomers should *never* do more than 100µg of LSD or 3g of mushrooms. Also, if first-timers have a history of nausea in any capacity, or if they're concerned about

²⁶ This is around 50µg of LSD or 1-1.5g of mushrooms. A hit of LSD is usually approximately 100µg, although dose can vary significantly from hit to hit, and there remains no substitute for knowing your source.

²⁷ This is approximately 100µg of LSD or 3g of mushrooms.

their own physical response, it's safest to provide half of the dose upfront, and the other half-dose as a booster once the first half-hit has fully taken hold (usually after 90-120 minutes), along with something to calm their stomach, like lemon ginger tea or seltzer water.

If you're unsure of the dose level of your substance, generally assume it's around 100µg per hit. No matter what, don't forget to test it ahead of time, to ensure that you've really received what you think you've received.²⁸



²⁸ Test kits are 100% legal, and procurable on Amazon by searching for “LSD test kit”.

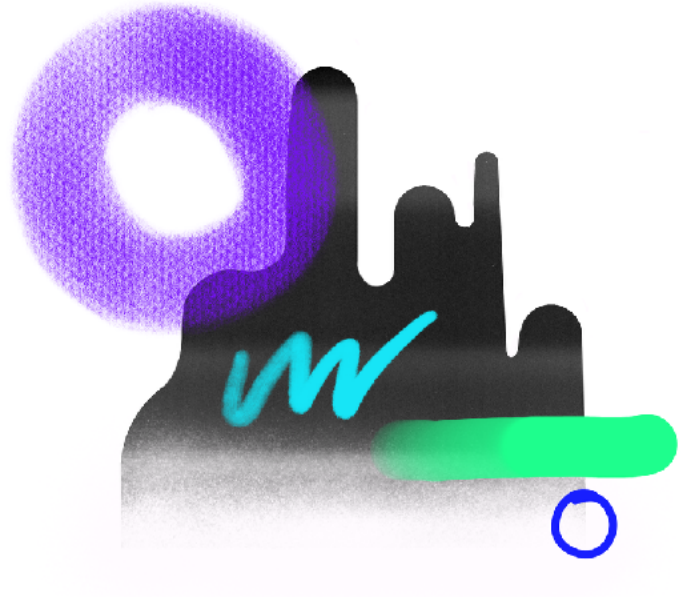
Preparation

What can you do to get a space ready for someone's experience?

Clean the space

Clean the space the day before the guest comes over:

- Tidy as much as possible
- Remove excess clutter
- Clean any dishes
- Clean the bathrooms
- Vacuum the place
- Hide any mirrors, especially in the bathroom, as well as any large televisions, reflective surfaces, or screens²⁹
- Baby-proof the place against any falls or (literal) tripping hazards



In short, you don't want an amazing experience to go sideways because an overflowing garbage can has started yelling at the guest.

If the setting isn't a private home, then prepare the space the day before, and try to ensure that no strangers will be present wherever the guest might be.

Get your supplies together

You may want to have supplies on hand for the guest, including:

²⁹ Guests are often upset by reflections of themselves. Don't risk it.

- Art supplies (especially for doodling during the come-up)
- Sage, lavender, or other dried herbs (to cleanse the room ahead of time, if the guest asks for it)
- Incense
- Candles (kept at a safe distance from the guest!)
- Kleenex
- Soft blankets, since the guest might get cold during their peak, and a warm, snuggly environment is always great to have around
- Lots of soft pillows
- A water carafe & glass
- A yoga mat, if they want to do any stretching
- An eyeshade, in case they want to eliminate any visual distractions
- A voice recorder, in case they want to record their experience³⁰
- Snacks to munch on during the day³¹

Compile the day's music

Music can be one of the most important parts of a guest's experience. Music helps ground, guide, and center the guest.

The playlist is usually collaborated on with the guest ahead of time. Before the guest's experience, ask them what genres they prefer, and if they have any albums or songs you should definitely play for them.

Unless the guest specifically asks otherwise, you want music that creates a calming, relaxed state. IDM, ambient, classical, dub, deep techno, and jazz

³⁰ Make sure any voice recorder doesn't connect to the internet, for privacy reasons.

³¹ We find that crackers, fruit, and nuts work well.

can work especially well. Avoid songs with words, as they could potentially be emotionally leading.

Generally, the primary sitter determines what is played – but the guest always has the right to ask for a change, including silence.

We recommend starting with more energetic music as the guest comes up, since it helps take their mind off what's about to happen, and let go of their concerns. Then, move into quieter, calmer music during the peak, so the guest can focus more on what they're experiencing. Finally, ask what the guest wants to hear as they come down. They might want specific music that means a lot to them, or they might prefer something more chill.

It's best to have a dedicated device for playing music. You don't want to be stuck fiddling with uncooperative technology in the middle of someone's experience. Load music on your phone beforehand or play from a computer, so that you can stay fully present. Avoid streaming services if at all possible,³² and test any devices before the guest comes over.

The end of the day

The guest may still be in the middle of an experience when it's time for everyone to go to bed. Try to have clean sheets and a pillow on hand, and prepare the guest's expectations that they will have a place to crash if they need one.

³² They're unreliable, they require a stable internet connection, commercials might harsh the vibe. In short, there are too many potential surprises to contend with when it comes to streaming services.

The experience itself

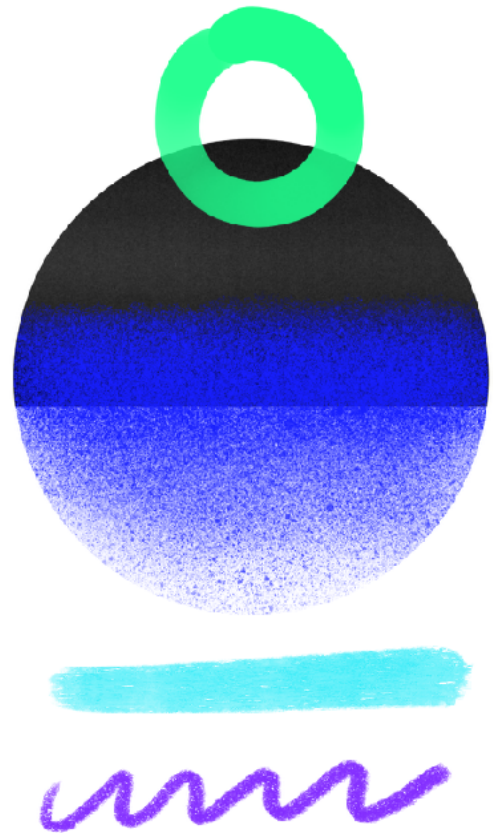
On the big day, how do you accommodate a guest, serve their needs, and see them through?

Before the guest arrives

- Eat breakfast.
 - Do any final checks of the space.
 - Talk with your other sitter (if you have one). Go over any last-minute concerns.
- Ensure that you're both on the same page about how to interact with the guest.

When the guest arrives

- Welcome them into the space.
- Give them water and a light snack, if they haven't eaten yet.
- Ask the guest how they're doing today. What did they eat that morning? Did they get a good night's sleep? What did they do the day before? How do they feel about the experience? These questions can provide insight into how to guide the guest, while also making them feel at ease on an unusual day.



Ground rules

Before you begin, inform the guest of these ground rules:

- **Nobody can touch anyone without permission.** Hand-holding is the only permissible exception. Holding hands can provide a guest with the connection necessary to see them through a difficult moment. But you should still always ask before doing so.
- **No leaving the premises without both sitters' permission.** This is a potential safety issue, as a guest may run away or react negatively to strangers. A guest might want to leave during their come-down, but each sitter gets final, absolute say on when and how that happens.
- **A sitter's word is law**, when it has to be. Unlike the guest, sitters harbor a full sense of reality throughout the experience. Sitters know how much time has elapsed. Sitters understand social graces. And sitters understand whether the guest is putting themselves in danger. If a sitter tells the guest to stop doing something, they have to stop, period.
- **At least one sitter must always be present with the guest** until the end of their experience.

Each of these rules exists to reduce the potential for an unpleasant or unsafe experience – for each sitter *and* the guest

These might be worth laying out in your initial meetings, so the guest isn't taken unawares on the day of their experience. That said, even if the guest is already aware of the ground rules, you should repeat them before you begin.

The presentation

Guests tend to be interested when they're presented with a substance, so let them take a look for as long as they need. We don't recommend any significant flourishes to the presentation, as that might make the guest uncomfortable.

Usually, intentions are discussed at this time. Maybe a prayer is said.

Coming up

Once the guest has taken their dose, they should situate themselves and get ready to come up. Make sure their setting is as cozy and comfortable as possible.

As the guest comes up, they might be nervous. This is common at the beginning of an experience. You can do best by helping them let go of their concerns, and offering a steady hand. Talk them through what they're feeling. Meditation may be useful at this point. Have them focus on their breathing. The more the guest relaxes, the more likely they will have a positive experience at their peak.

Water should always be on hand. The guest may start sweating, they may forget to hydrate, or both. Make sure their water glass is always full. Keep a carafe nearby, so you don't have to leave the room for refills.

Offering encouragement

It's useful for guests to vocalize what they're seeing and feeling – but sometimes they may be too overwhelmed, in a trance, or captivated by what they're experiencing – or what they're experiencing may be beyond speech.

Give the guest encouragement from time to time. If the guest finds something that looks beautiful or promising, your light touch might be the push that they need. Say something like “That’s good! Would you like to know more?” “You can explore that more,” “Go into that further,” and so on.

Make sure to be as neutral as possible as this unfolds. You usually don’t need to be a hands-on guide, especially not at their peak. You will know if a guest is in the middle of something difficult. Just quietly pay attention to them and make sure they’re doing okay. They will find the light on their own accord.

You may be privately happy that the guest is doing well, but your exuberance could affect the guest’s insights. Make sure you get out of the guest’s way, so they can have their experience on their own terms.

The peak

The **peak** is the most important part of one’s experience, and it requires the gentlest possible hand. Pay careful attention, but stay quiet. Keep your encouragement simple and infrequent.

Helping them through

Just as you can encourage the guest to pursue anything positive, you can also encourage the guest to focus their attention away from any difficult images or sensations. If the guest is breathing deeply, they’re probably doing okay. If the guest’s breathing is shallow and rapid, or they start to shake, they may be experiencing something difficult for them.

A guest is acutely sensitive to the emotional states of everyone around them, so you must display comforting and supportive body language

throughout their experience. If you're nervous, your nervousness will transfer to the guest. If you're warm and loving, your warmth will transfer to the guest. If you're feeling uncertain, your guest will pick that up, too. Confidently hold the space and tell them that they're doing great, despite what they – or you – may be thinking at the time.

Because of time dilation, it may be that the guest has experienced a comparative eternity. Seconds matter when helping people through difficult experiences. It may be useful to convey to the guest that not much time has elapsed since they asked you for help. Tell them that their feelings will pass, and they'll be fine soon. Hold their hand if they agree to it, and don't let go until they're through.

They've got this. *You've* got this.

Bathroom breaks

If you need to go to the bathroom, go. Guests can sense your discomfort if you hold it. Tell the guest that you're going to the bathroom, and that they're doing great. When you come back, inform them that you've returned, and you were only gone for a couple of minutes. A much longer period of time may appear to have unfolded for the guest, of course.

When a guest needs to go to the bathroom, you should offer to lead them by the hand, as they may have trouble walking. Keep the door unlocked in case you need to help them in the unlikely event of a difficult moment, and lead them back to where they were when they're finished.

The comedown

There are a few signs that the guest is past their peak:

- If the guest gets up or walks around.
- If the guest says they're hungry.
- If the guest starts talking to you.
- If the guest wears glasses, they'll probably take them off during their peak, and put them back on when they start regaining their visual faculties past their peak.

Valuable insight can always come late in a guest's experience. Keep giving them space to find what they need.

The meal

Usually, guests feel hungry for the first time as they start to come down. During this time, a light meal of whole, simple foods should be offered. Anything heavy or rich might diminish the substance's effects as the guest comes down.³³

The meal should be at least vegetarian; eating meat feels weird for many people during an experience. Avoid anything artificial or processed for the same reason. Make the meal ahead of time if you can, so you can focus on the guest's needs.

End of the day

The guest may not want to talk much. Good sitters are comfortable with sitting in silence, letting the guest process their experience on their own terms.

³³ We typically make a vegetable soup, since it's nourishing, warm, comforting, and easy to make ahead and reheat.

If the guest is still tripping at the end of the day, offer to let them crash on your couch or in a guest room. If the guest is going to spend the night somewhere else, make sure a sitter has the ability to personally take them there.

After the experience

Your job isn't done after the day of their experience. You were in the room, so you have a unique and profoundly important perspective on what happened to them. Now it's your responsibility to listen to what happened, honor the victory, and help the guest make sense of what they saw.

Meet with the guest

The primary sitter should meet with the guest, one-on-one, a couple of days after, in order to help them process their experience.³⁴

When meeting with guests, your primary job is to listen and validate. Do everything you can to affirm their experience, and gently let the guest know that many others have had similar experiences, yet their experience remains a reflection of their true selves. Help them understand what they saw as best as you can, while keeping any personal interpretation to a minimum.

Ongoing communication

No matter how your guest feels the day after, they will have more to discuss than could reasonably fit into a single meeting. Guests sometimes take weeks to fully process their insights, and new insights could become clear over a long time.

Make sure you remain available to the guest, if they need it. Keep listening, validating, and affirming.

³⁴ The day after, the guest may still be trying to make sense of what happened. Make yourself available to meet whenever the guest feels comfortable doing so.

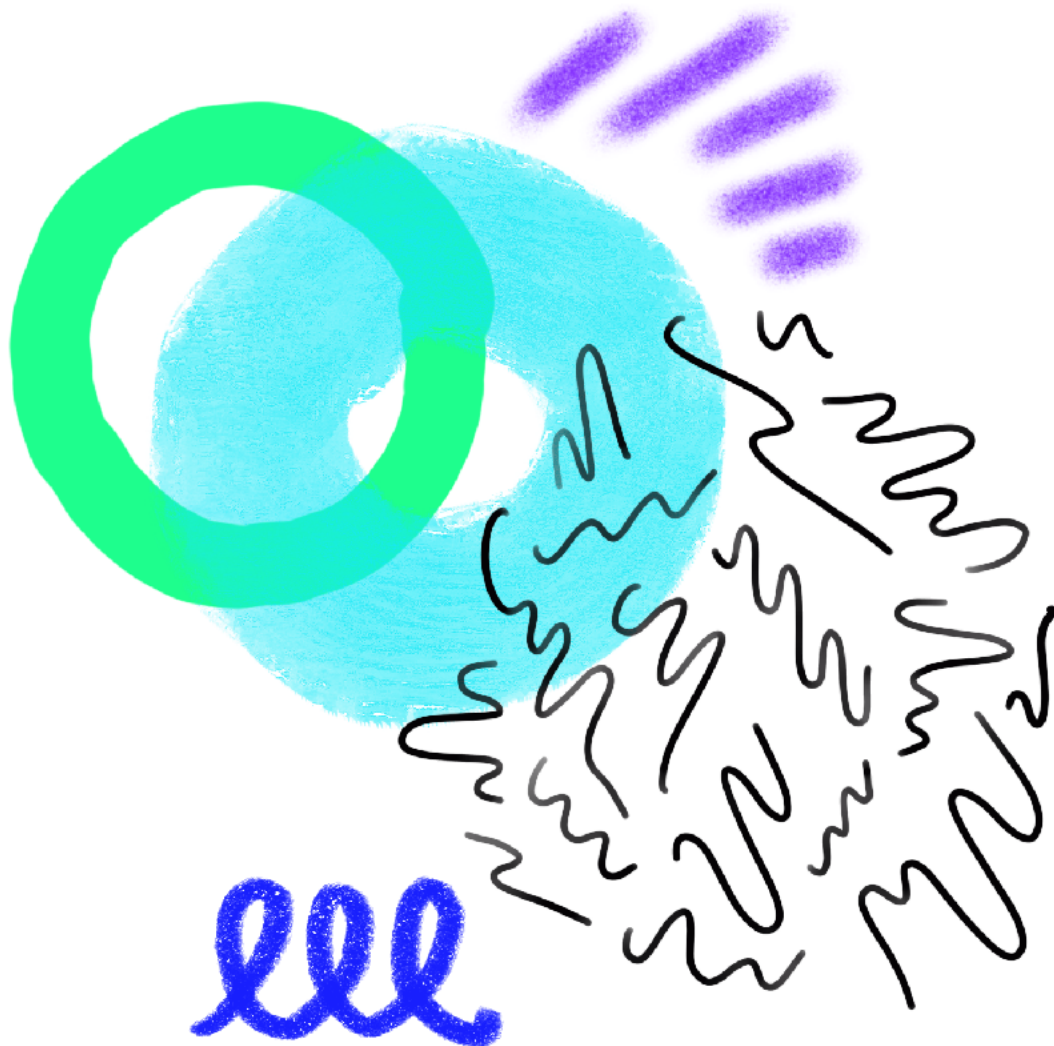
Serving each other

Sitting is a lot of work. It takes acceptance and patience, countless questions, logistic wrangling, a day of preparation, a day of undivided attention, and weeks of helping the guest with integration.

We've found that the work is worth it. This can be one of the most valuable and formative experiences of a person's life. And the guest is putting their life in your hands.

We are all connected. We are all beginners. We pay it forward.

We hope this guide was useful for you, allowing you to create safety, hold space, and help others.



Share these guides

If the message of these guides resonates with you, we humbly ask you to share it as widely as possible, so that others may have safe, fulfilling experiences, too.

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Colophon

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